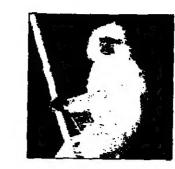
layers in a onderworld





Hubble, bubble

Guy Marks meets the witches of La Paz and picks up the odd charm or two...just for luck



Monkey business

Never bait a tiger - or stand behind an elephant. Two pages of advice and stories on India



Bargain buys

Watch a boat race on the Mekong, take a train along the Silk Road, tour the Towers of Trebizond. And more

Pages 6, 7

Page 12

When man meets bear it is generally the bear who is the loser. Just for once, the bear is winning, says Michael J. Woods

rock, the spring sunshine warm on my shoulders. Around my feet buttercups and yellow paintbrush flowers bird called repeatedly from a patch of newly needled hollow, wind-sculpted and smoothly green.

Not far below, a brook glittered and chattered its way towards Baker Lake. Gnarled mountains, Mount Richardson, Ptarmigan Peak. Redoubt Mountain, sent their long buff scree slopes

away, a young, female grizto forage for food, her coat alternately dark chocolate and silver in the sunlight. It was not long before a couple of hikers came along the trail and the bear silently supped out of sight into some trees.

The bear was one of seven young grizzlies being tracked by Cedar Mueller and Shannon Stotyn in Banff dian Rockies. Mueller and Stotyn, two Parks Canada zoologists, whom I had joined for the day, tracked the four-year-old bear using a transmitter attached to her ear. Too young for a radio collar, the bear is fitted with the first two years of her life, elapsed - providing the sci-

Parks Canada has started a programme of Research Adventures. Those taking part help people such as Mueller and Stotyn while, at the same time, enjoying a fulfilling holiday. These adventures take place in saveral of Canada's parks including Waterton Lakes. further south in the Rockies but their main base is in Banff and Yoho, where there

winter wildlife.

maybe even see a bear. It was with this in mind that I went to Moose Creek, a classic Canadian valley with spectacular, snowsprinkled mountains, narrow spires of spruce trees, flower bright meadows and a stream complete with beaver

Zoologist Cameron McTavish had told me that this was just the best place to see a grizzly, "The Moose is so thick with bears you'll have to light your way through em," he said. "Just put a glass on the western slopes and you'll see one." But he

"There's a sow [grizzly] gun, she'll sure as hell creep up behind yuh and she'll put the run on yuh." When his colleague. Steve Michel, took us out to Moose Creek on the next day. I spent much of it

Moose Creek is just out-side the borders of Yoho, and McTavish and Michel are trying to discover how many grizzlies regularly move in and out of the valley and how they might be affected by the cutting of

Michel is using DNA analysis to identify individual

flickered in the breeze. A

curling into the valley. Then about 200 yards

National Park in the Canatwo transmitters - one for and, ingeniously, one to cut entists with four years'

are opportunities to study and monitor biological diver-

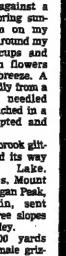
It was the bear adventure which most attracted me. For years I have been singularly unsuccessful at bear spotting and this seemed the ideal opportunity to help bear researchers, and - I

also gave a warning.

looking over my shoulder.

nearby forests.

bears and, to collect bairs for



worth of data.

sity, become a stream keeper

never knew my luck -

dams and lodges.

Perhaps it was such sud-den invasions of space that caused four grizzlies to have "encounters" with hikers in the 14 years since 1984 around Lake O'Hara. This area is one of the most picturesque in Yoho National Park and consequently has a large number of trails. These encounters, two of which and a cub there and, son of a ended in injury, have

> tion of the trails. A bear biologist was also called in to report on the situation from the bears' point of view. Meanwhile Research Adventures has helped with a socio-ecological research project to gauge how visitors use the area

Ultimately the mandate of stories". the park is to conserve wildlife but, generally, the final loser in any bear/human encounter is the bear.

Just for once, the bears

trees with barbed wire. Their

the barbs, and the scratch-

ing bears leave behind tufts

of hair and their essential

follicles for Michel's experi-

beside the creek entered dense thickets, he would let

loose a string of hoots and

hollers so that any grizzly

knew we were on our way. Like most wildlife, the bears

do not want to confront

humans and will lie low

until we have gone - unless

their private space is sud-

prompted the park authori-

ties to close a small propor-

denly invaded.

When the narrow trail

or turn detective and track bears' favourite rubbing Living With Wildlife project rubber bullets and firecrackhas been set up by Friends ers. He has not gone near a of Banff. One afternoon I rode with bear jam busters Lori Holmstol and Keith Crosley. Any bear close to a road rapidly attracts an audience and, while any fool-

Just grizzly: it is dangerous for a bear to become accustomed to human smalls - it may later invade camp sites in search of food

Super furry

animals

human smells and may later 'Out comes the Edukit, a trunk full of bear paraphernalia,

hardy snapper who walks up to a bear with his camera is

taking a big risk, it is much

more dangerous for the bear,

who becomes accustomed to

invade camp sites in search

and stories

If the jam is big, Holmstol and Crosley break it up. Sometimes they use loudhailers, although often their park uniforms are enough to have everyone driving away. Exerting "Jedi mind control", Holmstol calls it. Small jams are an opportunity to educate the inquisitive, so out comes the Edukit, a trunk full of bear parapher-nalia, skins, skulls and "a whole mental library of bear

We came across a queue of cars watching number 33, a Rockies by John Neville is cinnamon-coloured black bear. This animal was once accustomed to stealing food from camp sites until it was It is to avoid encounters lured into a false set-up by detrimental to bears that the park staff and fired on with

camp ground since June

It is to avoid the need for similar aversion therapy that Mueller and Stotyn are monitoring those young Banff grizzlies as they find their feet on the outskirts of

☐ Michael Woods flew to Canada with Canadian Atr-lines, tel: 0345-616767. For more information on Parks Canada Research Adventures contact Good Earth Travel Adventures, 12, 801-8 Street, Canmore, Alberta, Canada T1W 2B8, tel: +1 403 678 9358; e-mail: acodearth@expertcanmore.net; www.GBTadventures.com Most of the Parks Canada Research Adventures cost from C\$120 per day with-

☐ For more information on Canada call the Visit Canada Centre 62-65 Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 5DT, on 0891-715000 (premium rate) for brochures and to answer your questions.

out flights.

ii An excellent volume conyour wildlife questions is The Handbook of the Canadian Rockies by Ben Gadd, published by Corux.

If you want to learn your bird calls and other Rockies sounds before you leave, then a CD entitled Songs and Sounds of the Canadian the answer. Available from Neville Recording, 138 Castle Cross Road, Salt Spring Island, B.C. VSK 2G2, Canada. Tel: +1 250 537 8324, fax:

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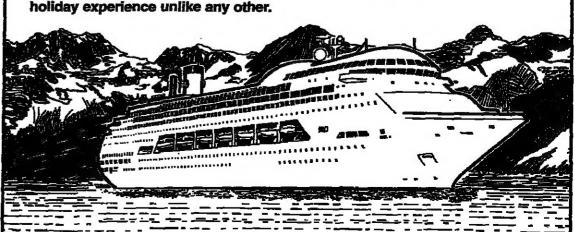
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NEW ZEALAND

Helicopters are banned and mobile phones don't work. John Westbrooke enjoys the remote beauty of the South Island

ew Zealand is tectonic treat, a long, thin country created as the Indo-Australian and Pacific plates push each other upward. But who would have thought you can not only see where they collide, but feel it and smell it?

We visited Arthur's Pass, the highest road over the country's highest mountains, in the company of Dr Gerry McSweeney, botanist, eco-warrior and hotelier. A short way down the western side of the road, he took us to a cliff side where the rock strata were exposed.
"That's it there," and he

pointed to one particularly dark seam of rock, the line where the plates meet. "And look at this." Squatting down, he pointed to a small spring of water. It smelt sulphurous, and it was notice-ably warmer than the icy mountain streams running down the roadside, as if squeezed out by the friction of vast sections of the earth's crust rubbing to-

And that is more or less what it was. Some day, tourists may come to gawp at this evidence of the planet at work; but for now, the road was deserted - just the crisp blue air, the peaks of the Southern Alps with their first dusting of winter snows, and us. If this is the Pacific Ring of Fire, it is a peaceful place.

Driving to Arthur's Pass from Christchurch, on the east coast of the South Island, or Greymouth on the the gold rushes of the 1860s. But a better way to get there coast journey and back outdoor car crowded with

Canterbury Plains, where night. grain grows and sheep graze. yellow-green hills and deep you can see the highest



The wonderful wizard of NZ

blue lakes, and up to the mountains from your bed. rainforest which begins near Arthur's Pass and covers much of the western slopes of the Southern Alps. (The is on one of the world's great mountains trap the easttrain journeys, the Tranz-bound rain, making the Alpine. It makes the coast-to-coast notoriously wet.)

After that, you can wind big scenic windows and an return to Christchurch. But we broke our journey 3,000ft up at the McSweeneys' lux-For a while it crosses the ury Wilderness Lodge for the

You could sit in your room before beginning its climb all day; not only does each ably made him enemies as up the broad shingle valley one look out across the valof the braided Waimakariri ley called To Ko Awa a Ami-River. The line runs along waniwa - "Valley of the high bridges over wooded mother of the rainbows" valleys, past bogs and tarms but each has a dressing-table and tussock, close-cropped mirror carefully placed so

But Gerry McSweeney's specialty is nature walks among New Zealand's

unique plants and animals. around, from giant butter-cups to native beeches, shy up] the sheep." says ferns to towering rimu trees. McSweeney. "So I asked every day from Christ- down past more rivers, lakes which would have been fel- them who'd like to come out church, at no great speed, in and sheep to Greymouth, led by loggers a century ago at 5.30am and help catch in the dense bush.

He was a director of the Forest and Bird Protection Society for years, and his campaigns against logging and for conservation predictwell as friends (count me among the latter). In 1989, he and his wife decided to prove ecotourism could pay, by opening first a 30-room guest lodge down on the west

the Arthur's Pass lodge. Attached to it is a working

sheep farm. "I was due to take some American guests Ha knows every plant on a walk one morning but I

"The highlight for them was when another bus full of tourists saw them, thought they were all local sheep farmers, and stopped to take their photos.

Still, it may be a pointer to the future of the economy of New Zealand - famously a country of 3.5m people and 45m sheep - that the tourist lodge is far more profitable coast, close to rainforest, than the farm,

As well as helping out with the shearing, guests can ski in the unsophisticated local fields, look for kiwi and kea - raucous, thieving mountain parrots -

the Pacific Ring of Fire, it is a peaceful

If this is

place go on guided night walks under the Southern Cross. or just relax and recharge their batteries. Gentle kayaking is possible, bungee jumping is not; helicopters are banned

and mobile phones do not

work. You go there for the beauty and remoteness, not for adrenalin activities.

In the evening, enjoy good cooking and watch the stars through the house telescope: with no light pollution, there are more than most city dwellers would believe possi-

South Island is very frantic. Greymouth is a small town with good craft shops: the west coast has deposits of greenstone (jade), another byproduct of geological

Christchurch is a bigger proposition, settled last century by the Church of England in imitation of an town. The grey stone cathedral, designed by George Gil-

bert Scott, still stands in the city in South Island terms, central square, although diminished by the ugly postmodern Noddyland architecture around it.

It is, however, enlivened by the lunchtime perorations

John Westbrooke was a of the Wizard - self-pro- guest of Air New Zeoland claimed living work of art. (tel: 0181-741 2299), which files theorist of the fun revolu- from London to New Zealand tion, role model for post-fem-

heart of town by tram, go punting on the Avon River, which winds its way through the city under willow trees, imaginary English market or stroll past carefully tended gardens surrounding

suburban bungalows. A big is on www.wixord.gen,nz

Christchurch is not far in lets on the plains or the blissful isolation of the Arthur's Pass high country. six times a week from 2660,

weak) and include breakfast,

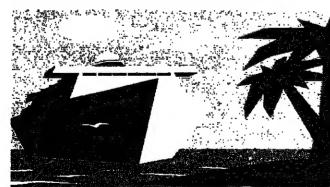
dinner and two walks. ■ Tran:Alpine trips cost NZ\$99 return and can be booked on +64 4 498 3303 out-

inist man, and metaphysical and of the New Zealand engineer - who wears a Tourism Board (0839-300900 black cape and pointed hat. in the UK, 50p a minute, or pontificates wittily on modwww.nzto.govt.nz). ern life and offers up rain ■ At the Wilderness Lodge. spells or blesses rugby playtel: +64 3 318 9246, nightly activity, which Maoris have long valued and carved. ers' underpants. rates start at NZ\$195 (£60 -You can ride through the the New Zealand dollar is

side the country. The Wisard

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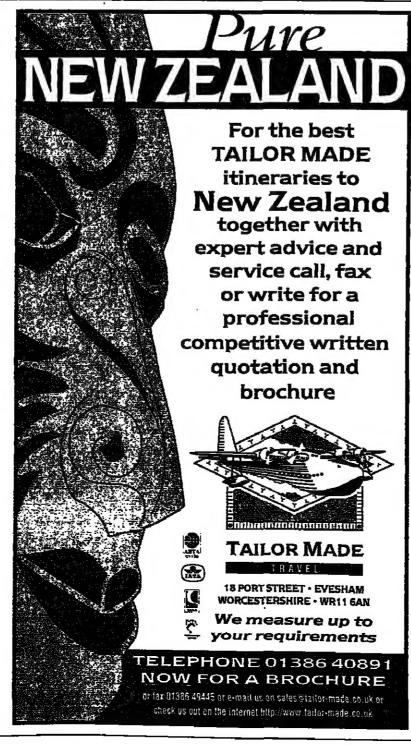
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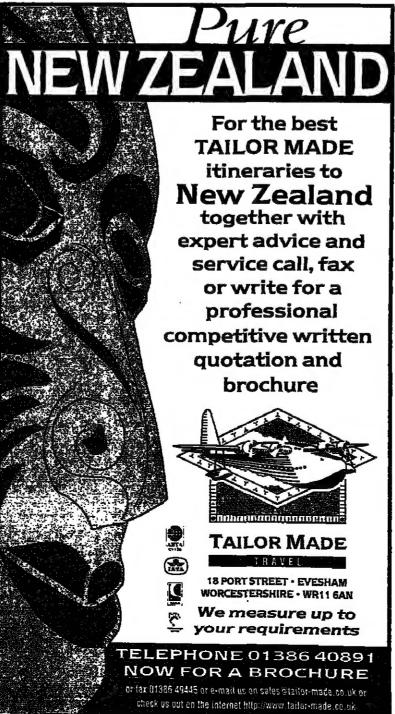
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Marks married

SOUTH AMERICA

An utterly bewitching time in Bolivia

So justwhat are llama foetuses sold for? Guy Marks travelled tdLa Paz to find out

st witch was lb. She sat on reet corner tening her stall I wondered ishe could be selling eye of wt and toe of frog, but I do't dare find out. She hada look about her that wast welcoming. Plercing eye sunk in a worn-leather ice, glared out from beneat the brow of her bowler it, casting dis-dain on passe-bye.

I could he her message without it eing spoken: Point that amera at me and I'll tu you into a toad." I most on down the street. It was narrow cob-bled alleywa running along the steep hidde in the city centre of Lasz.

Above it the "smugglers market", wire western con-sumer good with dublous origins can bought at bargain prices below it is the Plaza de Sa Francisco with its baroque plonial church: an incongrous facade of ornate, sciptured stone-

Sandwichl between these two monuments to imported culture, th alleyway is a haven of the Bolivian heritage. It is il of bright colours, of artin shops selling rich red oven textiles, shawls, haid-work and alpaca blakets. Musical instrument lakers sit whittling at stick of bamboo to make Ander pan pipes, and armour to pvide the bodies for Charams - the tradi-tional string instrument.

In amondhese workshops is the odd turist trap selling mock-alpa jumpers and five-year-d antiques. In front of the shops are the stalls for hich the street has becom famous. The women whitend them are not artisan endors, but purveyors of aritual and ritualistic parphernalia. They are the withes of La Paz.

ird of NZ

 $\widetilde{g}_{\infty}\widetilde{h}_{i}^{2}+\beta i=2\pi i$ THE THERE IS NOT walks this street, the "witches' market" is not there as a tourist attraction. It is a genuine part of Bolivian culture, drawing on ancient Andean beliefs that are still respected today. People from all walks of life come to this market to buy the ingredients for offerings to the spirit world.

According to Felix, my guide, it was disrespect for this culture by foreign visitors that had made some of the women so sullen. He took me farther down the street to talk to the second

The first ingredient was a layer of an aromatic herb called Koa, said to please the spirits

witch. Here we received a much warmer reception. With a smile, she held out a basket full of strange objects and, through Felix, explained what they were for. All the objects were to bring luck in one form or another and this collection, known as a cha'lla, formed the basis of an all-purpose offering.

white paper, white signifying a spell for good rather than a spell for evil. The first ingredient was a layer of an aromatic herb called Koa, said to please the spirits. Then the charms were added. These were a mixture of amulets made of clay or sugar with reliefs day life.

Each represented the desires and aspirations of hedging her bets, Althoughmany a tourist ing. A bag of money on a been incorporated into are thought of as messengers of her display, they were with small carvings repre-ritory. Felix was enchanted ca.com2



desk would bring luck in business, pictures of animals would bring health and fertility to a farmer's livestock. a courting couple would bring luck in love.

In among the charms were crosses and communion the person making the offer- because Christianity has

Andean religion. To com- to the gods and Apus - the added seeds and nuts, symbolic of abundance and wellbeing. The whole thing was then topped off with a dried llama foetus decorated with

coloured cotton and wool. However bizarre this witch's

plete the cha'lla she had mountain spirits. No serious offering was therefore complete without a llama foetus to carry the message beyond challa would be burnt or

usually made to order. Most of the symbols were

for good luck, but there were cast spells and gain revenge the physical world. The on enemies, Perhaps the most potent of Andean gods buried according to the is Pachamama. She is instruction. mother earth, an all-power- 25. Her name was less and might appear, it had its Although this one was ful, all-embracing life-force. she lacked the haggard 374566/7 or find them on the place in symbolism. Llamas already made up as part The witch's stall was lined image that goes with the ter- internet at http://www.titicu-

carved with three human faces, a snake for protection, a turtle for health and a frog for wealth. I bought one for a couple of pounds and moved on to the next stall.

The third witch was only

chatted away about the use of nearly every single thing on her stall. She had a broader range of charms than the other witches. including some animal skins which she pulled from under the table. She held the pelt of a small Andean fox and ran her hands through its whiskers, explaining the

nagical powers. If someone was suffering from grief, then an infusion of these thick hairs would put them back on track. As well as these traditional Andean medicines and charms, she offered goods from other cultures.

She had boxes and bags of berbal remedies and potions from India and south-east

She held a fox pelt and ran her hands through its whiskers, explaining the magical powers

Asia. For myself. though, I mythology and asked her for something to keep me safe on my travels. She produced a small clay amulet of a stylised condor-headed figure. This Andean bird has become a symbol of good luck for the traveller.

Perhaps Andean beliefs have survived because of their adaptability. It seemed appropriate that this magnificent bird should have become a frequent-fiver's talisman, and at just 20p, it was the cheapest travel insurance I had ever bought,

Guy Marks' visit to the Witches' Market was arranged by Crillon Tours, which operates cultural programmes, hotels and tours in Bolivia. Tel: La Paz +591 2

Learning the A to Z of Amazonian daily life

Ill Glenton keeps taking the tablets as he presses forward on a voyage of discovery through the Peruvian rainforest

lunched ourselves into the dose jungle. Facing the peril of giant anacondas, hurry caymans and the odd free-toed sloth, we luck and the tour

Wild ie is never more taries in tiny Zodiac craft in the heat of the day. reduces ou to feeling like a water ve trapped in a reed

more lik a natural fortress. Even wen you squeeze throughts outer defences it can droja portcullis in the shape da massive fallen tree to bck the way.

For miself and the other 58 woulde explorers on our expeditia cruise 2,000 miles from th Atlantic, it was frustratig to get so close and yet o far from the real action. | felt more like a paup peering through the railes of a zoo, unable to ford the admission

Occasnally we had glimpsetof monkeys swingand, yet we did see a tapir and a the-toed sloth - very young des kept as pets by twitches among us fared better. hey were treated to and oth exotic birds.

ned with insect guides. But I was still overhanging vegetation they had trouble finding it our-pellent, sunblock searching for the orange- fell in their hungry scores selves. searching for the orange- fell in their hungry scores selves. fronted plusherown by the time the red-eyed vireo had

whizzed by. There was no problem identifying a more familiar species - the red-eyed passenger. We were a blearylooking lot facing the first of schedule holy writ to get the day's expeditions. A hazard of jungle exploration we had never considered was rampan than along the having to get up before 6am Amazon Exploring its life at its most active. Sensithickly vergrown tribu- bly, it hides itself even more

Once we set out at night in the hope of seeing nocturnal creatures. Yet they proved Impenrable is hardly the just as shy, with only frogs word fo it. This jungle is and the beady eyes of a cayman to satisfy our growing zoological hunger.

I only wish the myriad insect life was as discreet. As much as we carefully cover all our limbs and spray ourselves with repellent, the mosquitoes - even wasps - penetrated our yellow fever zone the need to take the tablets and be inoculated is obvious.

Not so obvious, perhaps, is the vital need for a double. overall garment to keep dry. The problem with rainforests is that it rains. Twice ing through the thick forest I was soaked to the akin by Niagara-volume cloudbursts. When you are speeding through one in an open the loca Indians. The keen Zodiac, it is like going through a carwash.

We could, at least, get a constat display of parrots warm and dry aboard our adventure trips and set the cornucopia of tropical fruit mother ship, the aptly For thee of us who could named Explorer. But there not tella masked crimson was another kind of more tanagerrom a ruddy pigeon stinging rainfall that left we relift on the quick-fire less bearable marks. Ants. commetary of our expert As our craft brushed the

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upon us to give a whole new meaning to "travel ttch". The smell of insect sprays and balm became more

familiar than the usual perfunes worn by our women passengers. In the jungle, a dah of Chanel No 5 is a surefire way of attracting the wrong kind of attention.

> This was far from being a typical cruise, and the Explorer is far from being a conventional cruise ship

flesh made for a tasty dish. I felt like an over-dressed when we called at one of their simple, grass-hutted villages to watch bare-breasted women perform a supposed ritual fertility dance. Even in this remote region you cannot escape the inevitable folk dancing.

Yet this was far from being a typical cruise, and the Explorer is far from being a conventional cruise ship. Known as the "Little Red Ship", the 2,396 ton vessel was built specially for growing trend for such expeditions nearly 30 years ago. It has poked its bows into more oceanic nooks and crannies than a Jack Russell into rabbit holes.

Its cabins (with tiny private bathroom) are cramped compared with those on many ships, and it has limited public room space, but makes up for this with a big team of leading lecturers and friendly, intimate

With its ice-strengthened hull Explorer can go deep infamous piranhas, with into the Antarctic and Arctic. You will not find any loved it. Then, so did the other cruise ship with Iqui- aptly named devil fish with tos on the itinerary. In fact, their poisonous barbs, and most of our mainly Ameri- the equally fierce-looking

Twice our jet from Miami

tried to land at its airport, but was driven off by a rainstorm. We had to fly on to Lima, Peru's capital, for an unscheduled night's stay before we could fly back to Iquitos a day late for our planned week-long voyage. This surprisingly large Peruvian port can be reached only by air or river. isolated amid the dense jungle it has prospered from successive booms in rubber and oil. In between this strange mix of Wild West and colonial Spain it served as a vital American lifeline. From here came the chicle to

Even the mighty Amazon can leave Iquitos stranded outside the rainy season when the river level drops. It was a muddy torrent when we made our round trip from the port. The ship's bows cut through the water like a ploughshare turning over a

make its essential chewing

Every day we anchored once or twice to make our jungle expeditions with no other company than Indians. Our only other contact with the outside world was when we called at the remote port of Letitia, a bustling, largely Indian town.

The coca plant thrives naturally in the Peruvian jungle but there was not a drug baron in sight at Letitis. If there was any cocaine on sale, it was submerged by a and a scrum of Indians, pigs, chickens and ducks in the waterfront market.

However, I was told that the Indians chew the coca plant to keep themselves alert while fishing for long periods from their

The Amazon can hold as many terrors as the jungle at least for us on our organised angling trips. We should have guessed as much when we were given juicy red chunks of beef for bait. The their needle-sharp teeth.



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Even the many dolphins wanted. Our currency for we saw - they have developed an unusually long snout - had an uncuddly gruesomeness that would render them certain Disney friendly than the dolphins I had been used to seeing.

But not so the local everywhere. Nor was it the mighty American dollar they

buying their simple handicrafts was much sought-after - T-shirts, jeans and trackshoes.

less clothing than when we set out. What casual gear we had left was donated to the Indians who welcomed us ship's scheme to supply much-needed garments to the poorer Indians.

This was a rare trip most of us flew home with

But we were richer for the cruise's unique experience. It was certainly an education, if only for the thrice-daily lectures on Amazonian life which ranged from anthropology to zoology. We may have been disappointed with not getting to closer grips with some of the wildlife, but at least no one could accuse us according to cabin category of laying the rainforest to and length of cruise.

waste. We left it as undoubtedly were. The Explorer is operated by Abercrombie and Kent Holbein Place, London, SW1 W8NS. Tel: 0171-730 9600, fax: 0171-730 9376. Amazon fares range from £3.339 to £8.887 inclusive of return flight and





Try everything except cow-heel soup

Nicholas Woodsworth went to Port of Spain in search of genuine Trinidadian food. His tastebuds are still recovering

cally busy city roti stands

strange corner of the world, than when sampling a meal that can be found there and only there. It is the odd, local dish, after all, not the bland, universal one, that reveals the diner's true appetites.

But the day I arrived in Trinidad, I must admit, I speut lunchtime looking desperately for something to eat. There was no dearth of food in Port of Spain's hot and crowded streets - in dozens of small, hole-in-thewall establishments diners were busy downing brimming bowls of cow-skin souse, pig-tail, and cow-heel with gusto. It all seemed just a bit too odd and a bit too local to sit down and join in.

Better to swallow pride and self-respect than to swallow cow-heel soup, I decided. I took myself off to the blandest place I could find. In the Excellent City Centre. Port of Spain's air-conditioned American-style shopping mall, I discovered an Here at half-a-dozen shiny stir-fried noodles I settled on at the Happy Palace counter. But I was disappointed with

This was not the way to eat. This was not Trinidadian food - this was a tail-between-the-legs retreat to the international food distained by all bona fide food adven-

Was I losing my taste for the genuine, I wondered? In my time I had braved. almost without blanching. snake meat in Guangzhou and sea slug in the Sulu Sea. This would not do. I slunk out of the Excellent City Centre set on eating locally - not a morsel of off-island food, I determined, would

The days passed, and I continued to eat European. Chinese, Indian and Middle Enstern meals. For, it turned out, I could not have been wrong - all the foods in the mall were local and Trinidadian. genuinely Brought to the island over centuries by its many far-flung cultures, they are

am never happier, food from Europe, India, now enjoyed by everyone Not all of them serve cowdote, it is said, to too much found the ideal Creole food travelling in some China and the Middle East. here. One has only to look at heel soup. I was not disappointed the faces on a Port of Spain of the most cosmopolitan

> that some of the most authentic and popular foods of Trinidad are enjoyed. Port-of-Spainers are con-

crabs beside cornflour and cassava dumplings in boiling

stantly rushing about, and on busy weekdays rarely have time for relaxed meals. But their exuberance for life is reflected in their love of food and cooking, and all over the city sidewalks are bars, food stands, markets and impromptu restaurants.

My own initial favourites not refers simply to round, It is on the street, in fact, dad the bread - two layers of dough stuffed with ground split peas - is just the beginning. Into it goes curried meats, shrimp or vegetables. and then a layer of spiced chick peas or potatoes. The whole is then folded, making I sampled complete portable meal. It large blue is the most popular food of all, as entire rows of franti-

From rotis I graduated to other island specialties. In the Home Style Restaurant, I sampled curried crabs and dumplings - large blue crabs simmered beside cornflour and cassava dumplings in coconut milk boiling coconut milk.

At the Tal Hing restaurant I tasted shrimp chow mein, sweet and "browned down" with caramelised sugar in the island style. On Independence Square I tried Lebanese potato salad and kebabs. There, too, I ate arepas, maize patties stuffed with chicken, a legacy of Trini-dad's 300 years of Spanish

> I ventured into even more exotic territory. On a St James sidewalk late one boozy night, along with dozens of other revellers, I sipped corn soup, thick with kernels and loaded with pep-per sauce - the perfect anti-

fried bread stuffed with shark steaks and flavoured with a variety of spicy chutney sauces - papaya, lime. cilantro and flery yellow Even refreshments as

simple as the chilled green coconuts sold from trucks around Port of Spain's vast, grassy park, the Savannah, were delicious - first, one drinks the clear, cooling liquid, then, with a spoon fash ioned in seconds from the husk by a vendor's flashing machete, one quickly scoops out the soft, sweet, translucent jelly inside.

Now, this was all well and good, but as I ate my way through different cultures, I realised I was avoiding the central issue. The most basic of Trinidad's food traditions Issue from Creole cooking the foods evolved by black Africans making the most of their own traditions, backyard ingredients, and the often less-than-prime provisions doled out by their

French slave-masters.
This is the island's most serious eating - cow-skin souse, pig-tail and cow-heel all spring from it - and when I arrived in the tiny coastal Afro-Caribbean village of Blanchisseuse I resolved to tackle it head on. Luckily, in the person of self as a young girl helping cook holiday and Sunday feasts for a vast extended

She has been cooking ever

I cannot say I found the gluey and gelatinous hunk of boiled cow hoof terribly appealing

revered art of medicinal herb and plant cures. She took me into the kitchen and, in chopping, slicing, mixing and simmering, showed me a cuisine that was hardly as frightful as they sound.

Callaloo, coocoo, pelau, buljol - such foods are highly popular on the island and all. I discovered, taste fine. Callaloo, virtually a national dish, is a pureed mixture of okra and tare - two plants brought from Africa and essential in the slave diet. Flavoured with salted pork or crab, it is poured over plump, genial Sita Joyeau, I rice.

Coocoo turned out to be interpreter. Taught by her nothing more alarming than grandmother, she found her- a blend of cornmeal flour and okra, bound, as so much Creole food is, with coconut milk. Pelau is a tasty blend of cinnamon-spiced rice and peas. Buljol, a dried-fish dish, is particularly popular

in a coastal community like

over coconut husks and bay

Fish here is often smoked

Blanchisseuse

since. Sita is also consulted Blanchisseuse villagers in arcane and much-

> leaves, then sun-dried. Later soaked, it is tossed in hot coconut oil with tomatoes, hot peppers and onions. All stand comparison with what I regard as Sita's chef d'oeuvre, green banana salad served beside duck curried with cilantro, garlic, ginger and massala And so to cow-heel soup.

> Sita made it, I tried it, and to be honest - in spite of the covering flavours of split peas, pumpkin, carrots, yam, cannot say I found the gluey and gelatinous hunk of boiled cow hoof I found submerged there terribly

But there is a reason for everything, including the popularity of cow-heel soup. men comsume anything they think will improve their virility," laughed. "They devour the sea urchins off the rocks. They strip so much bark off the babande tree [from the French bois bande - swollen wood) that it droops over and dies. But there is nothing to beat cow-heel soup - it has something to do with all that glue. Men cannot get enough of it."

I cast my mind back to other outlandish meals I had eaten. It seemed to me I remembered vague, similarly extravagant claims for snake meat and sea slugs.

Mentally I filed cow-heel soup away in the same category of peculiar foods, and carried on enjoying Trinidadian cooking. Odd local dishes do indeed sometimes reveal the diner's

It's not suc1 a wild world

traillers. Bomb (Car Town). cidnappingsYemen), murders (th@ahamas): it used to be tit these were internal matrs, but nov tourists can 2 actively targeted.

So where on you go to ensure a saferelaxing holiday? Thenswer, as always, is: ju about anywhere, rely. But to be doubly sur, ask the Foreign Offic

It offers freiently updated advic about security in me than 120 countries, by hone on 0171-238 4503, a BBC2 Ceefax on pags 470 on, and (much thoulckest) on the interneat

www.fco.gov.t At present indvises laces, from Athanistan to Western Saira, and all but essential tivel to 11 more (Pakista;and south-east Turey among them). The FCias no power to ban litons from going anywhei, but travel insurermay use its warnings aan excuse not to recompese people whose trips hae been cancelled.

Most FO adve, though is of a less intlidating nature. India: Iware con men, drive witcare. encephalitis. Fince and Florida: watchut for hire cars with giveray number plates.'hailand: don't take drused drinks from strangers to tides at Phuket. Rusa: take US dollars in pstine

The US State Department's wrnings see travel.stateov/ travel_warninghtml than the FO's, mhaps because Americas are seen as being agreater risk. Indívidual Americans oftelook like rich targets to tor pickpockets; an rebels with ideological bjections to capitalism, Cristianity or Washington'role as Globocop may sike at anything represating Uncle Sam, from

Hollywoods. Some countrieclearly equire more the usual care. This may appeared include Islamic cuntries where westernermight be resented, thouh the State Departmenand FO are calm about Knya and Tanzania, scenes f the recent US embase bombings, merely dvising caution.

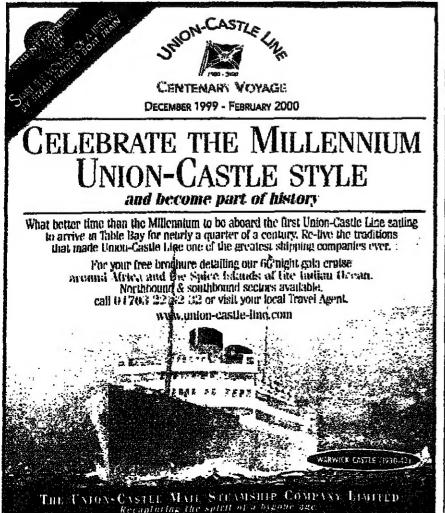
And among poular destinations whic still require care abouyour ssessions: Sout Africa and Brazil, wherehe FO notes high crime ites.

What can you dto reduce risks? Muc as you'd do at home.)rest down; leave jeweliry behind. Stay awayrom poor parts of town

Be streetwise abut stranger who poins out mud on your jacks and picks your pocket hile who asks to inspect your documents, the pasing driver who tells yo that you have a flat tyr. With countries sch as

amaica, Fiti, Spat. Turkey, the FO is t pains to stress that "mo: people have enjoyale, trouble-free holidas". before pointing to sinor problems, mostly i the bag-snatching varity. That's about rightFor every holidaymake in trouble you read abut, s million have nothig worse than a burnspot where the sun crean didn't reach or a qeasy stomach from the pella.

John Westbooke



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tour top spots. **Guy Marks** found that they offer a lot more than the view

wild

TOIL

dooded orange light across canyon wall. A mule deer emerged from the shadows behind the juniper bushes. She sniffed the fresh morning air and trotted off. calmly and sure-footedly picking her way downhill across loose rocks.

In spite of leaving the comfort of my hotel bed at 4.30am and driving just six miles to the rim of the Grand Canyon before dawn, I was not the first on the Bright Angel Trail that

There were not many people, but I knew that as the day progressed I would be joined by a never-ending army of hikers who march national park. It was therefore an unexpected pleasure to see wildlife at close quarters and to enjoy a moment of tranquillity in such a popular place.

Grand Canyon national park is top of the league of popularity, with far more to offer than the view. People come for the fishing and to raft the 277 miles (445km) of the Colorado River that runs through it. They come to photograph and to study its geology as well as to hike, horse-ride or just indulge in sightseeing. It was opened as a national park in the 1930s and the facilities were upgraded in the 1960s and 1970s to accommodate 1m

visitors a year. It was declared a World vying for the best view, that park authorities have come tam and cycle paths, using Although there was rarely a feritage Site in 1979, but no special vista across the up with a solution. They buses run on "alternative moment of complete solime had predicted the massgreatest chasm in the sarth's have decided that they do fuel". In the meantime, the tude, and at times there Heritage Site in 1979, but no one had predicted the massive influx of tourists that would arrive in the

uted across the land area, but they are not. The greatest proportion visit the South Rim as opposed to the two entrance gates they are channelled towards the visitors' centre and park headquarters at the Grand Can-

Designated viewing points along the way are filled all dawn and dusk, with visitors

f there is a more beau-

tiful place anywhere in

the United States than

Lake Tahoe, I have yet

to see it. The resort, which

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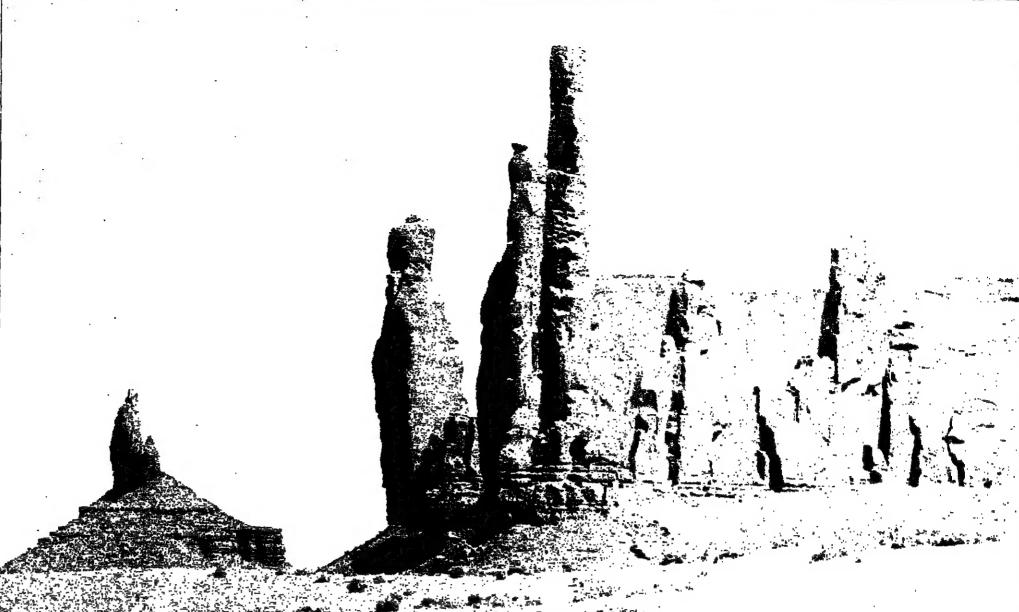
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rizona – take the rail to the trail

the number of visitors has doubled. The park authori-The park would be big ties undertook a management study in the mid-1990s, tions that 5m people a year

would be visiting by the millennium and 7m by 2010. They were wrong. The figures have already reached 5m, way before time. When 7m is reached, the problem will not be the 39,200 visitors per day or the 19,600 visitors yon village. at any one time, but the 8,780 vehicles that they come

> Faced with this monumental logistics problem, the

surface. In the past 10 years not want to restrict access to people - just to cars.

> built from the little town of Tusayan, just outside the the six miles to Mather Point to leave their cars and take the train into the park. The first stage of development is to open the orientation cantre in September 2000 and the rail will follow within a

couple of years. A transit hub will cater for 4,000 people an hour, taking visitors from the railhead

out to an extended trail sys-

existing shuttle bus service along the West Rim Drive A light railway will be has been expanded.

Last year saw the introolder fleet of buses is being and the Grand Canyon Vil- converted to liquefied natulage. Day visitors will have ral gas engines. Although numbers are increasing faster than predicted, the current system seems to be coping. I did not find any delays or long queues, which is quite an achievement under those circumstances.

> I spent the day walking down into the canyon and out to Plateau Point overlooking the Colorado.

were too many people for my liking, at least the trail was

The good orgamsanon was typical of the parks in Arizona

capable of supporting so much pedestrian traffic. The path was clean and well maintained with plenty of facilities such as water

taps and the occasional toi- with a small, tacky gift shop let block. That is an important consideration when so many pass by in a day. This good organisation was typical of the parks in Arizona. I did, however, find it strange but refreshing that the parks are largely under-commercialised, with a limited range

of shops, restaurants, stalls and even accommodation. Monument Valley does not have the same crowds as the Grand Canyon, but it is still a big attraction with more than 1,000 visiting daily. Yet Goulding's hotel just outside the entrance and the park's small campsite are almost

within 20 miles.

Goulding's led by Navajo Stanley Blackwater. After showing us some of the rock art at the habitation sites the only places to stay and getting his jeep stuck in the sand. Stanley led us to a The visitors' centre is dull hidden valley for lunch.

this sacred land.

and little else. The main

to see the desert landscape

rock mesas, and the archaeo-

remains of homes built into

caves and under overhang-

ing rocks that were inhab-

ited by the Anasazi Indians

up until 1300. Navajo guides

line up with truckloads of

horses to take visitors into

I took a day trip from

remote that I would have with its monumental red- lavatory tucked away behind the pine trees was a clue to logical sites. These are the the lunch-spot's regular use. I think the Americans have got it right.

> Arizona is blessed with some of the most impressive scenery in the world and it is still possible to enjoy it without being assaulted by commercialism. With considerable planning efforts. when the crowds come, it will still be a state of wide open spaces, hidden valleys and a little peace and quiet. allowing the consumer society to escape from its consumption.

The best of both worlds

David Spanier would bet his bottom dollar on the intimate gambling and ski resort, Lake Tahoe

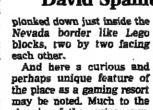
sits just on the Nevada side of the border with northern California, combines the best of both states. Tahoe offers what can best be described as "gambling with a human face". Consider its advantages.

Here, 6,200ft (1,890m) above sea level, is a 22 by 12 mile lake of pure water, ringed by snow-capped mountains and pine forests. It has remained, miraculously, unspoiled. The 70-mile drive around the lake shore offers view after view, across bay after bay, of soaring peaks set against green foliage and blue skies.

In summer, there are places to laze on the beach, which never seem crowded. Or you may sail across to a lakeside restaurant, to sip Chardonnay over a leisurely

In winter, there is Olympic-level skiing at Squaw Valley or Heavenly (well named) only minutes away. On the slopes there may be crowds, but American trails are quite different from the busy tracks which crisscross European resorts. The ski runs cover wide, saucershaped slopes, offering ample choice for novices.

But it is of course the gambling which gives Tahoe its



the place as a gaming resort may be noted. Much to the chagrin of the casino operators, the gambling facilities are fixed by law and may not be expanded. In other words the very thing which the casinos are

not allowed to do is what gives Tahoe its appeal to visitors - its intimate No wonder the resort is described as "the best kept secret in America". It seems to have been discovered by a

surprisingly large number of

British tourists among its 2.3m visitors a year. The most profitable casino is Harvey's and the most stylish is Caesar's Palace. Both offer pleasing restaurants and snack bars, looking out over the lake, which makes the sky room at Harvey's a great spot for

Both casinos cater to the middle-American public, with a cornucopia of slot machines fanning out in all



Lake Tahoe: in summer, you may sail across to a lakeside re-

jack, craps (dice) and roulette (but beware the double

in the regular season, room prices in the top

Thursdays and from \$149 on Fridays and Saturdays, rising in the summer season by about \$30 in each category. But there are also plenty casino-hotels run from of cheap motels available, the off-chance of hitting a

casino gambling is not is not exactly the primrose legal).

Low level gambling can be fun. After all, to risk a few is that the casinos are very coins in a slot machine, on ready and willing to give

path to addiction. regular players "comps" -

depending on their action at the tables or slots. All you need to do is ask a casino executive how long you need

to play to be "rated". This does not mean, by the character. There are four - directions, plus a swath of around \$119 (£72) for a dou- lined up across the border jackpot paying the lucky that is, free drinks or meals way, that a player must lose and only four - casino hotels table games such as black- ble room from Sundays to with California (where winner thousands of dollars, or a ticket to a show. (which he or she probably

will anyway) but simply spend a certain amount of time gambling.

High rollers get free flights and luxury suites. But in these days of intense competition for customers, all casinos will also reward low rollers with comps in propor tion. Why not take it, if it's going?

One of the features of Taboe is the enthusiastic crowd of sun-tanned students and other young folk (minimum age to play is 21) who buzz into town at the weekends. They may be seen lining up. often three or four deep, around the tables, so keen are they to get their money down. I mention this because Taboe casinos are more fun and more lively than the heavy-duty mass gaming scene typical of nearby Reno (75 minutes by road) or Las Vegas. The big news in Tahoe is

the plan to link the ski resort of Heavenly with the town by means of a two-mile long ski-lift. Work is expected to start soon. The main idea is to change the lakeside strip from its present commercial use, dominated by cars, into a pedestrian environment, with recreational and retail space, in

Alpine village style. When this project is completed, tourists will have the best of both worlds. Skiing by day and gambling by night, with hardly a pause in



To get there you must first fly from Delhi or Calcutta to Bagdogra in northern Bengal. Then you have a choice: either hire a car for the perilously steep threehour drive up the mountains, or take the train.

The narrow-gauge "toy train". as they call it, takes at least twice as long. Railway enthusiasts. however, appreciate being tugged along by steam locomotives built in Manchester and Glasgow more than a century ago. The tracks parallel the narrow main road as it ascends from the plains of Siliguri to the

Giles MacDonogh is shaken and stirred by the time he reaches Darjeeling unforgettable glimpses of the tea-

you will arrive in Darjeeling shaken and stirred. If you stay at the Windamere, the next few minutes will pass like a dream. You hand over your passport. sign the register and are ushered into afternoon tea; their own variety of Darjeeling (believed to come from Tumsong estate), wafer-thin tomato sandwiches

Meanwhile, your room is being prepared. At 5.30 a coal fire is lit in the grate and a hot-water bot-

tect you from the cold Himalayan gardens which cling to the sheer nights. Most, if not all, of the rooms seem to be large and old-fashioned. Faded photographs and oil paintings adorn the walls; and there are dressing rooms and bath-tubs with claw feet which seem to cry out for a gently forti-

> The Windamere's owners are conscious of the need to offer their guests some entertainment. Nepali dancers perform inside when it is cold, or sometimes in the walled garden in the summer.

face the evening's entertainment

brandy punch and pies. Peak after peak towers over the hotel, culminating at the end of

the valley in Kangchenjunga, at

28,145ft second only to Everest.

Just sitting on top of the world

Basking in the sun on the terrace during the day you are likely to encounter "Madam" fying dram of whisky before you Tendur-La, the hotel's 93-year-old owner, who still ambles amiably around with the aid of a stick. After dark the terrace is lined with braziers filled with hot coals to ward off the chill mountain

The hotel revolves around the dining room and the bar. All ers. schoolmasters and writers

tle popped into your bed to pro- A nip in the air brings forth hot meals (even tea) are included in with "A room with a view" or the room rate, and meal-times are observed with a strictness reminiscent of a seaside boarding house. Breakfast is copious: fruit. porridge, bacon and eggs with chicken sausages, American muf-

fins, toast, marmalade, Having work to do in the teagardens. I failed to experience lunch, but the candlelit dinner was something special. To some extent this was attributable to the planist, who nightly ran through her repertoire of Noel Coward songs, regaling package-trekkers, nostalgic former plant-

Somewhere I'll find you". The daily printed menu is liter-

ally Anglo-Indian. First soup, then a confusing choice which, it transpires, is no choice at all. An English dish is presented alongside one from Nepal or Tibet. The English dish might be the delicious local pork that comes from the little, black hairy pigs which scuttle around the nearby villages. Usually, then, you are obliged to eat the local dish, too, before tackling some sticky. Anglo-Indian pudding.

Late nights are rare at the Windamere, but if you are lucky you

may catch the bar before it closes. Over a Black Dog whisky and soda you will find that the other gaests loosen up and talk in scenes reminiscent of old films, about attempts to scale a focal peak, br how much they paid for a shawl in the bazaar.

Of course, this sort of hotel doesn't appeal to everybody. The morning I was woken at it some Americans next door complaining of cold and lamenting the absence of air-conditioning.

On the terrace I listened to a party from the US who were comparing notes on their rooms. They found the absence of television burdensome. Maybe to enjoy the Windamere's peculiar pleasures you have to be English, or have a special feeling for the

The Windamere Hotel, Darjeeling. sel +91-354 54041, fax 54043. Double rooms from \$80 (£50) full board. Payments must be made \$0 days in advance. Giles MacDonogh's stay was arranged by

Madras with marriage in the air

Nick Haslam finds that his character is under the spotlight

a page or two. "You are," he said, "principled, usually cool-tempered, but prone to the occasional blasting and testiness." I nodded in a cool, measured

"And your future wife will be of medium height, round faced, slow talking and prope to problems of the uterus." He must have seen the flush of testiness in my on. "But a remedial pilgrim-

age can change all that." Marriage seemed to be in the air in Madras for, barely had I arrived, when my mide, an engaging woman called Renuka, had invited me to her cousin's wedding. We had just finished a whirlstarting with St Mary's, the oldest Anglican church east of Suez. It was built in the 1680s by the British East

India Company. shady graveyard, only the hibiscus and pepper trees were a reminder that we were in fact in Tamil Nadu, and not some sleepy Sussex

The massive fort of St George nearby though, said more about the real secular purpose of the Company when Madras, formerly three sleepy lishing villages on the Bay of Bengal, became its first base on the sub-conti-

he astrologer nent. Behind St George's looked at me high ramparts the counting thoughtfully and houses of one of the most then turned over powerful commercial operations the world had ever seen were sheltered.

The fort today is a museum, and the many paintings of disapproving British functionaries in hot high collars attending the lavish durbars of cool, turbanned nabobs reflect the uneasy relationship which existed over the centuries between the colonialists and their unwilling hosts.

myself in pride of place on the front row of the wedding hall. Open on three sides to warm tropical breezes, horns brayed, and the bride, looking resplendent in a blue and gold sari, entered followed by the groom.

For half an hour, the Brahmin priest and his assistant chanted prayers and sprinkled incense until at last the couple, who had been shielded from each other by a large sheet, were united by a ceremonial string.

tarian food served on banana leaves, the newlyweds asked me if I was married. Polite concern was voiced at my astrologer was mooted. "You must take the opportunity while you are here." I was told. "Your horoscope and that of your intended are most important.

But thoughts of future connubial bliss were more or

morning we set off for Kanchipuram, one of the seven holy cities for Hindus and a two-hour drive west of Madras. As we approached through paddy fields the high temple towers or copurams loomed over wide stone-

washing clothes. Black-robed pilgrims wandered among more than 125 ornately carved temples. some of which date back to the 7th century.

Beggars and holy men sat in the shade, and I was glad that Renuka had reminded me to have plenty of change to pass out to the numerous hands stretched in our direc-

My favourite temple was

less forgotten over the fol- the massive Sri Ekambaranlowing days, for early next athar, with 540 columns in its dark courtyard, built around the sacred 2,500-yearold mango tree where. according to legend, Parvati, wife of the great god Shiva, had done penance for many

Unwisely, she had playtanks where women were fully held her hands over the Lord's eyes, plunging the world into darkness and forcing him to open his third eye to restore the universe. Only after she had completed lifetimes of obeisance did Shiva relent, a punishment which even Renuka, a devoted Hindu, thought was

a little over the too. I stayed that night at the Ashok hotel at nearby Mahabalipuram on the beach, and was up early next morning, as the fishermen put out to sea, to head back

> At Film City, a vast collection of sets and studios in the suburbs, where more films are produced than in Bombay, I met Mr Balasubramanian, the technical nanager, whose office occa-

rooms below. "We make family films," he said. "Much singing, hard cuts, romance and never less than three hours long."

"Are there any films, perhaps, without singing?" I sked tentatively. "Oh no -

wedding party posed for a photo with a concrete shark

Another

we call those art films - you must go to West Bengal if you want art films," said Mr Balasubramanian, a trifle

disparagingly. ing that day, but we were taken for a tour of the outdoor sets of Moghul Gardens, a Graeco-Roman temple, and a large concrete shark, where yet another wedding party posed for their photo.

The astrologer. unkempt man in his 30s. having delivered his analysis of my character (pretty accurate it was too, I thought) consulted his books for the last time.

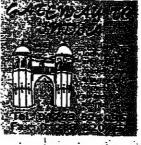
The nuptials should take place after next May, when Jupiter passes out of the 12th house - but you are an elephant, and must not

marry a lion," he said. Forewarned, they say, is forearmed, and making a mental note to stay away from cats of all kinds, I walked back into the sunshine of the real world.

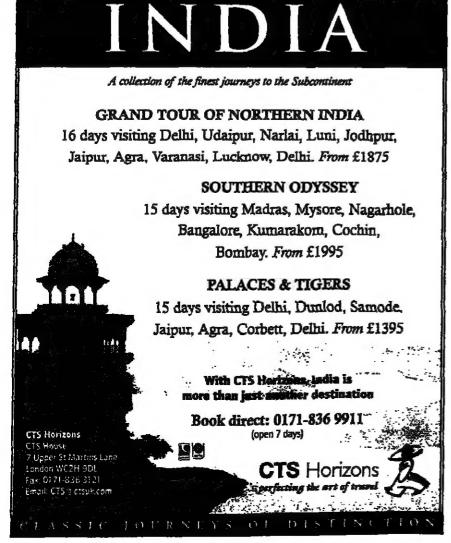
Nick Haslam flew to India with Air India (tel: 0171-495 7950). A return flight London-Madras is £453 but many travel agents offer discounted fares. The itinerary was organised by the Government of India Department of Tour-ism, 7 Cork Street, London.

















fascinating cultural

diversity, with the

INDIA

مكذا من الاصل

t 5.30am, the Sha-tabdi Express drew slowly out bound for Mysore and I settled back into my seat to catch up on some sleep. Minutes later a tap on the shoulder awoke me, and smartly dressed attendants brought a seemingly neverending succession of tasty breakfast of rice, vegetables and dahl.

World

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At Mysore, five hours later, Pradeep, my iguide, then amused when I groaned as he told me that lunch awaited at the hotel.

After the crowded bustle of Madras, Mysore, in southern India's biggest state of Karnataka, seemed to run in slow motion. People, rickshaws, cows and cars wandered at a languid pace through its wide streets against a backdrop of what most of which turned out to

Only in the market, heaped high with fruit and getables, did there seem to be any sense of urgency. Porters hurried past laden with sacks, shouting warnings to clear their way through narrow alleyways where the air was pungent with the smell

The car drew up at the Lalitha Palace, a magnificent vile of cupoles and colonnaded balconies, blindingly white and once belonging to a maharajah. Uniformed doormen seized my bags and led me down long, echoing corridors. eneath portraits of massively monstachioed maharaahs to my suite of two vast rooms overlooking the swimming pool.

Lunch was out of the question. So we sped away to Chamundi hill, where the air was a few degrees cooler. Mysore was spread below us, ing in the soft light of late afternoon.

That evening we joined a crowd of sightseers outside the grandest of them all. The Mysore Palace, home of the incumbent maharajah, cost Rs4.2m when it was built in 1912. "Enough," as Pradeep pointed out, "to buy a plot of land and small house in Delhi now - and a broom cupboard in Bombay."

In the gathering dusk its bulk seemed to extend upward forever. Then, to a gasp from the crowd, the palace burst into brilliance as thousands of light bulbs picked out its extraordinarily ornate outline against the darkening sky. There was no glow from the windows of the east wing, however. His Heaviness, as the maharajah is known locally. was away in Delhi on politi-

silhouette of the Western Ghats early next morning. we drove through fields of try roads were full of

dashboard of our car was a resplendent transparent figure of Ganesha, the elephant god, whose eyes winked every time the indicators were used. I had thought he was the God of Learning but the driver Ventak explained: "He clears obstacles for mind and body, and so is

cal business. Heading towards the misty morosely into their drinks. "Dropped a spoon in front

sugar cane and rice. It was said sadly. Pradeep muttered harvest time, and the counthat the murral was a fish, and all became suddenly clear. It had obviously not In pride of place on the been a good morning at the

Cauvery Fishing Camp. We put our bags in one of good for drivers also."

Under this benign protection we drove on, and at midday wound down a steep hillside to a tented camp by the tranquil banks of the Cauvery, one of south India's longest rivers. At the bamboo roofed bar, four

was with eager anticipation that we baited up and cast for the first time. Almost immediately Sidda Indians were staring had a bite, and landed a 51b

Drinkable water is far

was. You may now buy min-

eral water on railway sta-

tions, but there are times

You should

never bait a

an elephant -

out for rhinos

caution. Recently, in what

looked like malarial paddy

and watch

or stand

behind

dered, as the line grew taut, a veteran mahseer, which gives pound for pound a better fight than any other fish in the world, apart from the giant catfish of the Amazon?

the comfortable tents, and Muscles tightening, I reeled in, to land within secthen in the company of a ghillie called Sidda, set off onds a tiny catfish, which somehow I had hooked upstream in a buffalo skin coracle. A flash of blue sigthrough the tail. Sidda nalled a kingfisher beading roared with laughter and asked if all Englishmen downstream, and every now caught their fish backwards. and then the mirror surface Unruffled, I disentangled the of the river would heave with the sudden turmoil of a fish and threw it back. But our luck was out that evenhig fish. In the murky depths lurked the mahseer, which ing. Apart from a few more could grow up to 100%, so it catfish, nothing else struck. As night fell and cormorants came to roost in the

camp we paddled back to base, and settled into bammahseer, which he returned boo easy chairs. Gusti, a jewellery manuto the river. A minute or so of the big black murral and later I felt that brief electric factures from Hyderabad the chap didn't take it," one quiver on my line, and

struck hard. Was it, I won-London, told me that earlier in the year he had hooked a big mahseer from the coracle. "The blighter towed me up and down the river for half an hour," he said, "and then we tipped over."

Poor Gusti had lost his camera and portable phone but kept his sense of priorities. Clinging on to the rod, pools. But only small catrish smillily at my cheap store-

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Lakshadweep Islands.

for another half an hour wrapped the line around a civilisation, sharp rock and broke for

Next morning, well bitten by the fishing bug myself, I was up early and, with Sidda, tried some other him, and he said looking

ones stayed away. We left at before the cunning fish 10, bound for Bangalore and

> Gusti had just returned from casting a spoon more successfully this time, and had some good size murral in his bag. I congratulated

hought rod: "Come again and maybe better equipped You might be lucky next

time. ■ Nick Haslam flew to Madras with Air India. His itincrary was organised by the Government of India Department of Tourism, (See opposite page for phone



Monkey business

Giles MacDonogh with some dos and don'ts in India

story about her last trip to India. She had been staying in a genteel hotel in the mountains. She returned to her room after a walk to find the bed occupied by a monkey.

thinking of the beasts I had seen in the streets of Simla. "It was the size of a cocker spaniel," she replied indignantly. "I advanced on it, hoping I'd frighten it away, but it began to bare its teeth.

"A small monkey?" I said,

and ran at me." The friend fled to reception imagining the monkey committing unspeakable acts in her absence. She found little sympathy with the hotel staff: "What! You left the window open? You must never do that in India!"

There are many things you don't do in India, the chief worry is riding roughshod over Asian sensibilities, and it is not always clear what they are. When in doubt, don't. Hands, especially what to do with women's hands, are a nightmare. The answer is: nomoste - a prayer-like gesture, a smile and a slight inclination of

The Indians blame the British for the red tape necessary to get anything done: You taught us to do it that way," they say. Banks consume time. If you don't have time to spare, change your

money at the hotel. Baksheesh, or modest bribfor. An Indian friend tells me

friend told me a you are in only moderate train journey; you have to be food than I was, but as a rule trouble is to put on the airs a committed railway buff to I do not eat salads or cut of the burra sakib: "Author want to take the train to fruit. The test of a real India of the burra sakib: "Authority works." Tipping is a plague. A wad

of Rs10 notes kept in a sepa-

rate pocket is a good idea. Rs10 is generally enough, if they protest, give them Rs20. Crowds are an unavoidable problem in India and you need to keep your wits about you outside airports and railway stations. Freelance porters tend to grab at

your luggage. I have never taken a bus. From the outside they are a wonder to behold: stuffed full with human cargo. In rural regions, I have seen as many as 14 clinging to a Land

Trains always somehow contrive to be dirty, even in the super-swish "AC 1st class". In theory, this contains four berths, but you are very lucky if the conductors don't admit more.

A conductor once tried to billet a general on our already over-filled carriage. I asked the man whether generals enjoyed the right to requisition seats on Indian trains, it appeared that they did not and he went else-

Taxi fares are worse than arbitrary and if questioned drivers pretend they do not understand English. Calcutta cabbies must take the prize for being the filthiest in the world.

sive alternative to a long

fields in Bengal, I was offered the choice between water and a soft drink and I drank my first glass of cola in nearly 25 years. I generally travel with a bottle of whisky, as alcohol

is not always available when you want an evening peg. Whisky and soda "without ice" is a dependable drink Indian beer is sweet and Rural taxis, on the other ery, is generally uncalled hand, can be fine, and are gassy. Tea is generally very sweet and milky. often a relatively inexpen-

Simla or Darjeeling. Hiring hand is said to be his ability an Ambassador with a driver to eat "brains masala" from a streetside stall. I haven't is the best means of getting about, as the driver also made it vet. If you don't enjoy haggling, and want to feels it part of his brief to ward off beggars and other buy presents, go to government-run Cottage Industry shops, where the prices are easier to come by than it reasonable - and fixed.

tamarind tree opposite the

I take every precaution against mosquitoes I can. I enjoy the security of a net, or the sight of a benign lizard on my ceiling, in the knowledge that it is on my

I have had few encounters with larger pests. I had a driver who was apt to point out cobras from the car window, but I have only come up close once, and I was convinced the reptile had had its teeth removed.

You should not bait tigers or stand behind elephants, but problems can occur naturally. Another Indian friend was charged by a rhino in Assam as a child. His guide threw a stone, hitting the animal on his horn. It threw the animal off balance and it ran away. As the friend put tt: "That man should have played cricket for India."

I have never had problems with dacoits, thugs or pickpockets either. Only when if came to visiting a temple earlier this year, was I advised to hide my valuables and leave my camera in the car: the monkeys pinched everything, I was told, and it could be the devil getting I am less prudent about them to give it back.

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SEYCHELLES

If you want to do nothing on holiday...

...then Arnie Wilson knows the place to do it. Of course, you could snack, snooze or sunbathe

the brochures, I could hardly wait for the "gala evenings with international chefs working delicious menus from the islands' abundant fresh fish". So, when I asked for the menu at the Village de Pecheur on the island of Praslin, I expected to have to wade through a Davy Jones's lockerful of permuta-

After all, this was the Seychelles, the bulging fishing net of the Indian Ocean. which claims 900 species of fish. Instead, I felt like the subject of a Bateman cartoon: "The man who dared to ask for fish at a fish restaurant." What I got was the Creole version of "Fish is off,

Life is not always easy in paradise - especially when a beat wave warms inland waters so much that the fish stay far out to sea, causing a shortage in the kitchen. It was like being told that there was no cheese in Prov-

problem in July and August when the sea gets rough, but right now we should be enjoying a surplus of fish," said Louis d'Offay, the owner of the Hotel l'Archipel. a "five-coconut" establishment with rooms dotted around a tree-filled amphitheatre on Praslin, second largest of the Seychelles

"Christmas is usually wet. but this time it was beautifully dry. Now we've got an unprecedented heatwave and a fish shortage. We're having to buy our fish from Mahe [the main island]. It's costing us a lot," said d'Of- entertaining two young "I don't know what's Swedish tour operators to

rooling over happening to our weather, one of l'Archipel's excellent Maybe it's El Niño." Just when I thought I had left El Niño behind, it had

> Indian Ocean. The tourist literature says the top temperature in this collection of 115 islands, just four degrees south of the equator, is 32°C (90°F). On the morning we arrived in Mahé the temperature was already 33°C and rising. By lunchtime, it was 35°C.

"If it's global warming," said d'Offay, "we may have a problem that people from

'Our room was in the shadow of casuarinas and palms by the beach'

the UK won't be so anxious to escape here for their sun-

In fact, most of his guests "We sometimes have a come from France - 44 per cent of them last year - and French is widely spoken in spite of the islands' strong Commonwealth links. Those links are responsible for the fact that traffic, bicycles principally, travels on the

> lay's guests came from Britain last year, but the figure has dropped to 6 per cent this year. "Now I'm looking actively at the Scandinavian market," he said, "There's more chance of people from the colder parts of northern Europe turning up." Indeed, that very night d'Offay was

fish buffets. It must have cost him a small fortune. The Russians are coming,

too - or at least they were turned up to haunt us in the until the rouble ran into difficulties. One Russian brideto-be got a nasty shock when she turned up at L'Archipel: her wedding dress had been sent to the wrong island. It was retrieved just in time for

> We had started our tour of these exotic islands in the only hotel on one of the smallest, Desroches. It is an archetypal coral island 155 miles (250km) south of Mahe, encircled by 9 miles of white sand. Happily, the Desroches Island Resort's claim to be a combination of luxury and simplicity turned out to be reassuringly accurate.

Our room, in the shadow of casuarinas and palms just a few paces from the beach, was equipped with satellite telephone link, air conditioning with a remote control resembling a TV channel selector, the ubiquitous mosquito net (although the scourge of the tropics was little in evidence), colourful rattan furniture in pastel shades and vibrant, tropi-

cally inspired fabrics. This is the island for people who want to write "absolutely nothing" under the section in their diary which might normally be reserved for "What I Did During My Holidays". One might even be stretched to

fill a postcard. Apart from snorkelling. swimming, cycling or walking round the island - per haps bumping into the ET look-alike giant tortoise there is precious little to do here except snack, snooze and sunbathe. And precious



As the hotel only has 20 rooms, there are so few people on the island that you can choose your own stretch of beach and have it almost to yourselves all day and every day. Admittedly, our convivial

hosts Jocelyn Gonzalez, the French general manager, and his wife, Patricia. become restless once in a while and escape briefly to Paris and the Riviera (usually one at a time - someone has to mind the shop), but if ever there were a little island resembling paradise,

Sometimes you might find yourself sharing the beach with the odd crab, a small flock of fairy terns, or even a gang of unexotic house sparrows. To our surprise, and slight disillusionment, the first birds we encountered in these islands so famous for their bird life were a large flock of sparrows, descen-

long ago on board a supply

We were soon, however, admiring the rather more exotic acrobatics of a pair of white-tailed tropicbirds. Their gentle screams of exhilaration (if that was the appropriate emotion) pierced the soporific sound of the

Sometimes the shadow of a lone whimbrel's curved cutlass of a beak falls across the sand, sending panic-stricken crabs scurrying for their holes to avoid being unceremoniously speared and consumed.

There seemed to be no shortage of fish on Desroches - we had endless supnlies of grilled grouper, red snapper and napoleon fish ~ but we were a touch disappointed with the bird life. Genuine twitchers may say that my credentials are sadly lacking, but the incredibly rare may be exciting for

ornithologists but not so mind-blowing for the ordinary holidaymaker.

I have to admit that, by mistake, we cycled right past the sanctuary at La Digue where most of the extremely rare Seychelles black paraflycatchers were allegedly skulking. But, perhaps naively. I had been hoping

My one

complaint, common to tourist haunts, is the canned music

for a supporting act of humming birds, parakeets and possibly toucans.

The brightest fellow we came across was the Mada-

gascar fody, or cardinal. This

cheeky little bird, resem-

feint with the skill of a footballer. Confronted by a squad of very non-league barred ground doves, our breakfast companion - obviously premier league material - seized a chunk of discarded croissant and managed both to keep posession and devour it while weaving an intricate pattern through the doves' defence.

orange paint, can dodge and

Ronaldo himself could hardly have done better. My one complaint - and it is one common to so many of today's tourist haunts - is the ubiquitous canned music. It seemed inescapable. Even at the Bonbon Plume restaurant, just behind one of the best beaches in the Seychelles at Lazio on Praslin, our delicious meal of octopus curry, giant prawns and sliced papaya was in danger of

music of the Bee Gees.

air-conditioning is at least a straight choice between romance and comfort, resolved by my partner saying one night: "Turn that bloody machine off so we can hear the sea." But did we really need the Beach Boys at the expense of the the real sounds of the sea. Arnie Wilson's visit to the Seychelles was arranged by Scott Dunn World, Fovant Meurs 12 Nayna Road, London SW17 7PH (tel: 0181-672 1234), and the Seychelles Tourist Office, 111 Baker Street, London WIM IFE (0171-224 1670). He flew from Gatwick to Mahé and then on to Desroches and Praslin with Air Scychelies, which flies to Mahé twice a week. Seven nights at the Desroches Island Lodge, including all flights, is £1,634 per person and a week's half-board at being overwhelmed by the L'Archipel is £1,460, both

A battle between the

sound of the ocean and the

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A whale of a time in Québec

Forget dolphins and their mawkish ways, says Antony Thorncroft, go and see the big mammals

mere sperm whale, he was missing out on the real monwhales and the finback lowed the lead of his rich Yankee contemporaries and bought a summer home on the banks of the St Lawrence at Tadoussac where he could shoot whales all day: never ending. with a camera, of course.

Tadoussac is a picturesque little town of brightly coloured blue, red and green clapperboard houses on the edge of the forests where the Saguenay River roars down its fjord to the St Lawrence.

In the 18th century it was a trading post, and has the oldest wooden chapel in Québec to prove it. In the 19th century rich Americans idled away the brief Québec summers at the resort with yachting and fishing. Today's holidaymakers enjoy much the same plea-sures, plus the daily whale

Tadoussac is perhaps the most reliable spot in the world for watching whales. In a good year, up to 13 different species spend their summers feeding off the krill and tiny fishes which mass at the spot where the two rivers meet. It is hard not to think that they are putting of Gaspé - "the end of land", on a show as they suddenly rear up for a "blow" yards from the viewing boats before shaking a provocative marine-hugging communitail and disappearing in another deep dive.

to the locals that they have inland.

Moby Dick, a vast French-speaking proveven more essential since the government ban on catching cod, decimated by overfishing, seems to be But the cod's gain is also

> Winters are long and hard, the

summers hot and usually reliable

the visitors. This is a dreamy holiday destination - bucolic, slow-paced, unspoilt, friendly and cheap. Eco-tourism may be an over-ripe cliché, but if it means trekking through forests, kayaking down rivers, observing great colonies of sea birds and indulging in a little deer shooting and salmon fishing, too, this is the spot.

The northern bank of the St Lawrence and, on its southern side, the peninsula in the Micmac Indian language - are like New England in the 1950s: tiny, ties on the coast, the houses

The seaside villages may

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small minded. The whales are proving an by Acadians, the idealistic for Mohy Dick Maritime, that part of the Scotia who were scattered (some as far as Cajun New ince which stretches out Orleans) after the British towards the Atlantic In the won Canada: nearby New sters of the deep, the blue 16th century it welcomed the Carlisle is anglophone, with first French explorers to descendants of the Royalists whales. He should have fol- North America: now it wel- who moved north after the comes tourists. They are American revolution; then on to Paspébiac, home to the Basques, who first fished these waters in the 17th century. Off-shore are the lightly populated islands of Anticosti and Madelaine, where you do feel you are at the end of the world,

The winters here are long and hard but the short summers are hot and usually reliable, and from the end of June a spirited tourist season erupts. These fingers of land pointing towards the north Atlantic have more attractions than just raw nature: for a start living is remarkably inexpensive.

The Canadian dollar is in the doldrums; fares from the UK to Montreal are low; costs - at neat, small, seaside, hotels; in crab and lobster-rife restaurants, and for incidentals - are irrationally reasonable. Two weeks idling through Québec Maritime, all included, should leave generous change from £1,000.

Of course it helps if you are fescinated by seabirds, especially gannets, which congregate in their thousands on the island of Bonaventure, a nature reserve off Percé, where a tall rock, rising from the sea, acted as a natural beacon to the first cheerfully coloured; a wilder- adventurers and now draws So familiar are the whales ness of wood and mountain tourists. It is an advantage if you like five-day excursions kayaking down rivers, where look sleepily similar but you are more likely to see their names tell their history moose and black bear than



people; it is a positive dream gone completely soft: there by the French chocolate if you fancy a good long are also wonderful opporto- magnate Henri Menier in walk, because next year the nities for hunters and fish-Gaspe peninsula opens its era, especially on the island. Eden: in other words as a stretch of the Appalachian of Anticosti, easily reached vast 1,000 mile (1,600km) Way, and the mountain by ferry from Havre Saint-square hunting ground. and by hunters in the you tell a beluga from a range which starts in Geor-Pierre, close to the end of Many of the animals he autumn. range which starts in Georgia can finally be traversed its whole langth, ending at the sparkling, sea-locked,

Pierre, close to the end of from Rivière-au-Renard on Gaspé, or by air.

1895 as his own personal the road on the northern brought over to shoot, such shore of the St Lawrence, or as bear and moose, failed to stone, but eventually deer

ing humans, who are joined by salmon fishermen, artists tatio for Marine Mammals and hermits in the summer. at Troussac, which enables

Today, Anticosti is govern-

island are himmious, making this uffiniate in escapism totally bearable.

The great majority of visitoe great majority of visi-tors to Québec Maritime are bolidaring Québec's campaign for interpendence deterred other canadians and Amer-icans, who once flocked to this accessible outback. Now tourisis, especially from Europe, are warmly courted. Since his is new, consumer-friendly, tourism, the routes are ditted with interpretation centres, which add greath to the enjoyment of a

frip.
These centres follow a standad format - one room displays artifacts, another offers an audio visual presentaion, the third is a shop. Pheir various subjects

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aptly sum up the Québec Marime experience. Near Gasp-there is a visitor centre a the Forillon national park which describes the old ard life of the cod fishemen and the attractionsof the park. Nearby is the licmac centre, where todayindistinguishable from their ellow Canadians, talk you prough the rituals of their ancestors - the total tepeexperience.

On he north coast of the St Larence, where the land-scapels wilder and life is harshr, a diving centre at Les scoumins welcomes experenced divers and gives novics, by video, a secondhand mmersion into diving the cal, dark, sinister river, whileArcheo Topo at Berge-round offers a lively introductin to the discoveries from local archaeological sites which go back more

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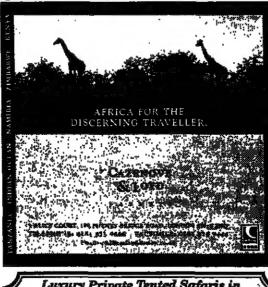
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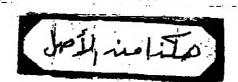
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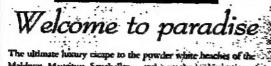


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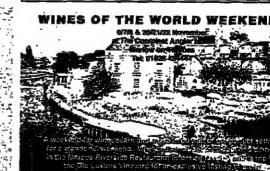
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he Asian financial crisis means bargains seven-night. package linking Kuala Lumpur's Ritz-Carlton and the luxury Pangkor Laut resort starts at only £450 (flights extra); call +44 01628-771171.

Premier (+44 01223-516677) can give you a week in Bangkok from £449. TravelMood offers 10 nights in Malaysia, with flights to Penang, from 2399; details from +44 0171-258 0280. Asean Explorer (01481-823417) claims the cost of a 12-night trip to Bali, from 2636, is a 10-year low. Flying business class (with Gulf Air) from London to Bangkok, Jakarta or Manila costs just 2979 until the end of November with Bridge the World (0171-734 7440). Even in New Zealand, where the tourism industry is suffering from the disappearance of visitors from south-east Asia, Travel 2 (+44 0541-550066) has cut 20 per cent from self-drive holidays.

☐ GRAND TOUR: Go around the world with 80 neonle as Orient-Rypress inaugurates its Great South Pacific Express down eastern Australia. A

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10-country itinerary will include a private tour of Kensington Palace, masked Ball in Venice, Bedouin desert party and a Rajasthan banquet, and much more. with trips on three Orient-Express trains and Concorde. It leaves London next April and costs £38,000 including everything. Itinerary from +44 0171-805

☐ TRUNK ROAD: Amble through northern Thailand on elephant back for six days, as part of a luxury 13-day holiday with One One Travel (+44 01935-812000). You get your own trekking crew and spend the nights camping or with hill tribe villages: "Your seat on the elephant is well padded," the brochure advises.

□ LAKELAND: A third of Malawi is water -300-mile-long Lake Malawi, with golden beaches, islands and some hotels around its shores. Sunvil (+44 0181-222 9777) will get you to this little-visited African country, as an add-on to a safari or for a longer stay.

I MAKE TRACKS: The Trans-Siberian train across Russia is 100 years old this year. Bridge the World offers



sam. Out in hardback, the book is published by Sa £39.95 (159 pages). The painting above shows PMS Arcedia In G and was already a long-standing port of call on P& O's route from Great Britain to the east

a variety of ways to share a remarkable experience of eastern life, including possible stopovers in Ekaterinburg, Siberian rillages, the Gobi desert, Buddhist monasteries, Russian homes and Mongolian nomad tents. Call 0171-911 0900.

DEEP BLUE: Lose the blues at Indigo Bay - an exclusive resort on Bazaruto island, Mozambique. Stay in individual chalets, all with private facilities, and (when not relaxing) indulge in the many activities (some included): fly and deep-se fishing, snorkelling and

scuba diving, catamaran island hopping, or just watching the wildlife turtles, rays, humpback whales, dolphins and gongs, and 140 species of bird. In you go: call Three Cities Hotels on +44 0171-225

☐ HIGH SOCUETY: See a tsechu in Bhutan - that's a festival, in the remote and rarely visited Himalayan kingdom – with Steppes East (+44 01265-810267); the £2,995 trip, leaving London on September 28, visits India

SWING LAO: The annual

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boat race on the Mekone River in Vientiane is a lively affair: after a night of spirit worship, men spend two days racing longboats, while question their sexual prowess. Watch it with Symblosia (+44 0171-924 5906); a 16-day trip leaving Bangkok on September 23. costs £885 plus flights.

LAND, SEA AND AIR: Go on a safari with a difference a 10-day wildlife tour of Mexico with Union-Castle Travel (0171-229 1411): you'll see millions of monarch butterflies waiting to fly to Canada, turtles hatchir whales migrating. You stay in big huxury or small, elegant hotels. Best months: November to February; price

☐ INDIAN SUMMER: Ah. the things to do on the subcontinent. Bat your way round India with Cox & Kings (+44 0171-873 5000) on a tailor-made tour taking in cooking demonstrations and tasting of north and south India cuisine. Or unwind at Rajvilas, a Jaipur hotel with India's first luxury spa, combining western

aromatherapy and Indian ayurvedic health principles for "Aromaveda" treatments Greaves Travel: (+44 0171-487 9111). Or go to the famous Pushkar camel fair -November 1-4 - with camel racing, traditional dancing and 50,000 camels for sale: Explore's 23 day tour costs £1,360; call +44 01252-344161. Or try a touch of the Raj at Darjeeling hill station on a tour with Imaginative Traveller (+44 0181-742 8612),

with side-trip to Sikkim. TAKE IT EASY: See Nepal the easy(iah) way with a Gentle Trekking and Luxury Lodges trip with Himalayan Kingdoms (+44 0117-928 7163). Stroll the Annapurna foothills, drift down the Seti River, meet the people; from £1,550.

SALES DRIVE: Stay a night in Seattle's Hotel Monaco for tust \$25,000. The price includes a free key thain and a 1999 Mazda Mists convertible, gift-wrapped for a grand presentation. Details from +1 206-621 1770.

LOOP OF SILK: Adventurous types can travel the Silk Road by train with imaginative Traveller

(+44 0181-742 8612): a 31-day loop will take them through China, Mongolia, Russia. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Stops include Lake Baikal, narkand, Xian for the terracotta warriors, and maybe a night in a ger, all from £3,255 plus flights.

☐ HORSEPOWER: The great thing about horses is that you can ride them almost anywhere: Argentina, Morocco, Botswana, Mongolia, Jordan, India, New Zealand, Italy. . . All are available through Ride Worldwide (+44 0171-735 1144), which will tailor a trip to your preferences.

ORIENT YOURSELF: The Peninsula hotel, Hong Kong. offers a four-day Chinese programme in October and November: find out about feng shui (bring your house plans), tai chi, herbal medicine, dim sum-making, tea-preparing, brushpainting. Book through Leading Hotels of the World:

☐ AIR PRESUMPTIVE: See Africa the old way, on private flights during the day and first-class botels at night. Air Voyages of Distinction has adapted a Boeing 757 to seat 106 passengers (instead of 237) and two departures next year will explore spots such as Mauritius, the Skeleton Coast, Mt Kilimanjaro and the Victoria Falls. Details from +44 0181-464 4488:

Turkey nobody knows - the lush north-east (and neighbouring Georgia) with Pontic Tours: Group ours or tailor-made visits go for the Byzantine monasteries. Ottoman mosques, the plant life, the horseback riding in the Caucasus, the mountain scenery... or just the golf. In the works: a guided tour to now called Trabzon) in the footsteps of writer Rose Macaulay. Details and inspiration from +44 01548-55049.

☐ TURKEY TROT: See the

 ARABIA FELIX: Yemen is only gradually attracting the attention of travellers with its scenery and its striking ancient akyacrapers. Take a 12-day trip with Steppes East (+44 01285-810267) and visit the walled city of Sana'a, the

medieval capital of Taizz, the desert town of Shibam. and Marib, the Queen of Sheba's capital (probably). The escorted tour leaves on October 11 and costs from

TRE TIME: Tee off somewhere different with Southern Cape Golf Tours (+44 01252-793804). Courses include Elephant Hills at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, and Sun City, Swaziland (crocodiles at the 13th hole). Mauritius, Namibia and, of course, South Africa are available; escorted tours go in the porthern winter, but tailor-made and fly-drive tours can be set up

whenever you want.

□ WILD AND WOOLLY: guided wildlife trip to Australia with Naturetrek (+44 01962-733051), leaving on October 3 and costing 22,995. There'll be pink-eared ducks and kookaburras in Perth. dugongs in Shark Bay, sealions off Esperance, noisy scrub-birds in Two People's Bay (the only place they exist)... Flora too, from spring wildflowers to karri forests. Quokka? A small, friendly wallaby.

D JUST DESERTS: Saudi Arabia must be the biggest richest; best-known country that no outsider ever goes to - until now. Bales introduces 10-day tours, from £1,996, next year. looking at traditional erchitecture, isolated. valleys, deserts, Nabatean rock tombs (like Petra's). Tourism is new, patience will be needed, and unmarried couples won't get visas. Tel: +44 01306-885991.

☐ POLAR BAIRNS: Head off from Winnipeg to see the polar bear migration, and the northern lights too, on a nine-night tour with Abertrombie & Kent (+44 0171-559 8620) in October 1999. Two day-long excursions will provide close-in viewing and photography of the bears and their young. Cost: £3,910.

I LOUNGE, LIZARDS: If you fancy relaxing in airport business class lounges without the expense of flying business class, join Priority Page (+44 0181-256 9062). Members pay £69 a year, and £14 a visit, for access to 220 lounges worldwide from Aberdeen to Zurich. THE REPORT OF THE PARTY OF

UN DU SUD: Some of the world's southernmost vinevards are in New Zealand. Visit names like Cloudy Bay and Te Mata on a two-week February tour with Arblaster & Clarke Wine Tours (+44 01730-893344), in the company of Margaret Harvey MW. It costs \$2,699.

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RIDE 'EM COWBOYS: The Calgary Stampede takes place next July 9-18: cowboys riding wild horses bareback, chuckwagons racing, musical variety shows, and all in sight of the Rockles. Kuoni guests can buy a 299 Stampede package when they stay at the Delta Bow Valley Inn downtown; seven nights including flights from £1,049. Tel: +44 01306-742888.

☐ GAME DRIVE: Take a self-drive safari in Tanzania with Safari Drive (01488-681611): for £1,820 and up you get a Land Rover, and suggested 15-day itineraries including stays in the Ngorongoro Crater and the Serengeti in lodges and tented camps. You also stay on Maiia Island (but honefully won't have to sleep with the fishes).

OVERS DOWN UNDER: Visit Australia and you can see not only the opera house and hats with bits of cork hanging from them, but the last two Ashes cricket tests, if you take an Austrayel package. Leave December 23. watch England triumph, and come back on January 6, all for £1,337. Call 0171-734 7755.

☐ AFJORDABLE: Take a two-day tour of the fjords of... Oman, by dhow and 4WD; bordering the Strait of Formuz are 600km of cliffs, lakes, coral reefs and deserted beaches, open to the public only since 1994. says Arabian Odyssey (+44 01242-224482). Excursion costs from £548.

☐ SYDNRY Opera House is 25 in October; call Aussie Helpline (0891-070707) for a list of the many celebrations.

☐ AFRICAN Experience cuts up to 15 per cent off holiday prices to South Africa as the rand tumbles Call 0990-168 246,

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M This weekend merks Heritage Open Days in most of Britain, when a variety of properties of historical and architectural interest, not normally accessible, are opened free to the public.

Belle Tout lighthouse at Beachy Head, for instance, the country's only residential lighthouse, opens its doors to the public for the first time this century. You can see the second world war headquarters of Flight Command at RAF Bentley Priory, Stammore, the new Ruskin Library at the University of Lancaster, the private ink Pen Post Box Museum in Taunton and a host of others, Details on 0991-800603 (50p a minute) or on the internet

at www.clvictrust.org.uk" Other regions' open days are handled separately: for Scotland, where openings are staggered over ends throughout the month, call 0141-221 1466; Northern Ireland, 01232-543078; Wales, 01222-484606....

of properties is in London, and will be open next weekend. Amount no show homes: Lloyd's building. designed by Richard Rogers Partnership, and Alfred Waterhouse's Prudential Insurance headquarters. The event has proved highly popular - up from 200,000 visitors in 1994 to 500,000 last year ... Bosnie on October 9, information

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Station Hotel or the Foreign Office, expect to queue for hours. But there are always undervisited hidden gerns: Art Deco c'nemas, architects' homes, medieval barns, civic buildings and many more. Details from 0891 600 061 (from 39p a minute) or http://www.londonopen house demon.co.uk

The Heritage Open Days are promoted in part by the Council of Europe, and involve 44 countries. Russia and San Marino have been on display, but others open on various weekends this month Germany tomorrow, France and Italy next weekend) through to - and if you want to see St Pancras from Brussels: +32 2549 0277.

